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SUBJECT: 1540 COMMITTEE DISCUSSES ITS ROLE ON BIOSAFETY AND  
BIOSECURITY

REF: A. USUN 1170

[1](#)B. USUN (KONZET)-STATE (SANDAGE/WUCHTE)  
EMAIL--12/13/07

[1](#)1. SUMMARY: Members of the Security Council's 1540 Committee held a thematic discussion on biosafety and biosecurity on December 18, which the Committee's Chairman (Slovakia) scheduled to help determine how the Committee's April 2008 report to the Security Council would address these issues. Several members expressed support for increasing the Committee's engagement on the issue, including by facilitating the provision of technical assistance relating to biosecurity and biosafety and by increasing engagement with organizations and individuals with expertise on biological weapons. Many members also stressed the need for the Committee to avoid duplicating efforts underway elsewhere and noted the Committee's lack of technical expertise relating to biosafety and security. Russia and South Africa continued to express skepticism but did not attempt to prevent the Committee from continuing to discuss the issue (Ref A). END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. Slovak PermRep and 1540 Committee Chairman Burian opened the discussion by inviting delegations' to provide general reactions to a background paper on biosafety and biosecurity that the Committee's panel of experts had prepared (Ref B). USUN expressed general agreement with the background paper and support for the Committee's consideration of the topic, particularly since an ongoing effort on implementation of the biological weapons-related provisions of resolution 1540 is not being made elsewhere. USUN recommended that the proposals in the background paper deserved a more careful debate and suggested that a small group of experts could be convened in 2008, under the Committee's auspices, to discuss more fully what UN Member States can do to ensure that they meet their 1540 obligations relating to biological weapons and means of delivery and to discuss the background paper in more detail. USUN pointed out that efforts under the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) have emphasized that by fulfilling the requirements of the BWC, states also can fulfill their obligations under resolution 1540. USUN also pointed out that last week's BWC meeting of States Parties agreed on measures States Parties should make, both nationally and in providing assistance to others, but noted that attention now turns to the 2008 topics of biosafety/biosecurity and codes of conduct for the life sciences.

[1](#)3. China's delegate complimented the experts on the quality of the background paper and said the rapid development of the biotechnology sector and availability of dual-use material increased the threat of bioterrorism. China said resolution 1540 had an important role to play in strengthening countries' biosafety and biosecurity measures. Specifically, China said States should improve security protocols for biotechnology laboratories and personnel; strictly manage the

use, stockpiling and transport of pathogens and toxins; strengthen advocacy for biosafety measures in the private sector; and increase international cooperation. China noted the Committee's primary role should be to facilitate assistance to States that lack capacity in these areas.

¶4. Russia expressed general support for the discussion on biosecurity and biosafety, but criticized the background paper for not adequately reflecting Russia's view on the issue. Russia reiterated its argument that the Committee should limit its discussion on biosafety and security to the scope of the 1540 mandate (i.e., efforts to counter proliferation by non-State actors only). Russia said the background paper contained many elements that were already being covered by experts of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) in Geneva. Russia also cautioned against focusing on technical matters related to biosafety that were outside the Committee's area of expertise. Instead the Committee should concern itself with identifying biosafety and security issues that dealt strictly with 1540 implementation.

¶5. South Africa's delegate echoed Russia's concerns and said the 1540 Committee lacked the technical knowledge to deal with complicated matters such as biosafety and biosecurity. Furthermore, South Africa cautioned against the "politically motivated" practice of using the Security Council to undermine multilateral conventions (e.g. the BWC) already working on biosafety and biosecurity issues.

¶6. France expressed concern over the weak input the Committee has received from States on biosafety and biosecurity measures related to 1540. Responding to Russia and South Africa's comments, France said the Committee's discussion on biosafety and security was relevant because many Member States are not parties to the BWC; unlike the BWC, 1540 commitments are binding on all Member States.

France also said that the Committee should develop more concrete proposals for assistance in these areas.

¶7. Italy suggested that discussions relating to biosafety and biosecurity should occur in Geneva, where experts on the BWC and other issues relating to biosafety and security are located. The 1540 Committee should assist the Geneva-based efforts relating to biological weapons, Italy said, rather than taking significant technical decisions. In this regard, Italy called for the Committee to invite organizations with expertise on biosafety and security, such as the World Health Organization, to brief the Committee.

Khalilzad